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SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: Senegal: Former National Assembly Chair Arrested

REF: Dakar 08 1401

11. (SBU) Summary: On January 26, The Minister of Interior, Cheikh Tidiane Sy, issued a press release accusing former Prime Minister Macky Sall of money laundering. Subsequently, Sall was ordered to appear in the central police station to be taken into custody. Sall resigned a couple of month ago from the ruling PDS (Democratic Party of Senegal), after having been ousted from his position as President of the National Assembly by Wade loyalists. Since then he has created his own party and joined a coalition of opposition parties to contest the upcoming local elections. While there is certainly a possibility that the criminal charges arrayed against are legally sound, the timing is widely believed to be political motivated to prevent Sall from being a factor in the local elections and to nip his presidential ambitions in the bud. End Summary.

Eliminating an opponent

12. (SBU) Macky Sall's Chief of Protocol, Samba Diop, told Embassy that Sall was ordered to report to the Main Police Station of Dakar on January 27 with his communication adviser Abou Abel Thiam. According to Diop, units of Special Forces from the Dakar police department, led by Police Chief Modou Diagne, have been watching his house since January 26. Sall has already set up an emergency task force with his lawyers and made a press statement strongly denying all accusations. His spokesman said that Sall fears that they wish to detain him to derail his preparations for the March 22 local elections and to prevent him from attending the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, which would raise his international profile.

Handy charges

13. (SBU) The press release states, "The Ministry of Interior has received information indicating that Mr. Macky Sall, former Chair of Senegal's National Assembly and Mr. Abdoulaye Sall, a Senegalese National residing in Gabon are involved in a money laundering network. The Ministry has intercepted correspondence with an African Head of State indicating that the suspected funds come from the latter. This type of financial operation is illicit and the Ministry of Ministry of Interior and the Prosecutor's office are investigating the case."

The culprit

14. (SBU) The alleged accomplice is a billionaire who has businesses in Gabon and who recently joined Macky Sall's party after being a member of Union for Democratic Renewal (URD) (a party in Wade's own coalition.) He arrived in Senegal for a family visit on January 24 and was harassed at the airport and thoroughly searched by the police. His house was illegally searched as well. Although no evidence was found, the police decided to arrest and detain him on January 26 on the grounds that government had documents establishing his conspiracy with Macky Sall in a money laundering operation.

COMMENT

¶5. (SBU) The sudden and convenient apparition of criminal charges against political opponents has become common under Wade's regime. After former Prime Minister Idrissa Seck fell out with Wade, he faced the same kind of harassment. It now appears that it is Sall's turn. In a discussion that he had with poloffs in December (Reftel) Sall acknowledged that he would probably be harassed. It is sad to say that these charges come as no surprise, especially on the heels of Seck's return to the PDS.
Bernicat